

Hindu Image from Sarawak.

By J. C. MOULTON.

Early in 1921 a very interesting discovery was made at Limbang, Sarawak, by workmen removing the top of a hill near the Residency. They unearthed a small stone image, in remarkably good preservation, of Ganesa, the elephant-headed god of Wisdom. Ganesa or Ganapati, as one of the sons of Siva and Parvati, is one of the most revered gods of the Hindus. In the Hindu-Javanese religion he is Sang Yang Gana. He is the god of wisdom, the remover of obstacles. He is invoked at the beginning of a book and of important undertakings. He is a short fat figure, with protuberant belly, four hands, and the head of an elephant with only one tusk. In one hand he holds a shell, in another a discus, in the third a club or goad and in the fourth a water-lily. Sometimes he is depicted riding upon a rat or attended by one. His temples are numerous in the Dekhan. There are many legends accounting for his elephant head.¹

The Sarawak image (see illustration) shows the god sitting on the usual lotus cushion. The actual height of the image is 24 inches and the rough stone block on which it rests 12 inches. Mr. F. F. Boulton, Resident of Limbang, sent it to the Sarawak Museum, Kuching.

Prof. Dr. N. J. Krom of Leiden University, to whom I showed photographs, when he was on his way through Singapore, tells me that similar images were found on Gunong Kombeng in South-East Borneo some ten years ago.² They included a Ganesa, a Brahma and a Siva. He suggested that the Sarawak image was of more direct Hindu origin and therefore probably older (6th or 7th century) than these discovered in South-East Borneo, which were undoubtedly of Hindu origin. A list of all the Hindu images discovered in Dutch Borneo will be found in the "Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indie" (1919) vol. III, p. 198 under *Oudheden*.

Sir John Marshall, Director-General of Archaeology in India, kindly gives me the following interesting note, from which it will be seen that he suggests a later date for this Sarawak image.

"The image appears to be very similar to the ordinary type of Ganesa in India. The chief distinguishing features of the latter are (a) the elephant's head, (b) three eyes, (c) four arms, the usual symbols in the hands being a bowl of sweets, a rosary, an arc and the detached tusk of Ganesa himself, (d) a corpulent belly, (e) and a snake doing duty as the sacred thread. In the Borneo image we have the same large belly, the elephant's trunk and a snake for the *yajnopavita*.

1. *Vide J. Dowton "A. Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology."*

2. *Oudheid Kundig Verslag* 1914, p. 152.

"Indian images of Ganesa are found seated in three different postures: (a) cross-legged, (b) one of the knees upraised and the other lying on the throne; (c) the right foot overhanging from the throne and resting on the ground and the left leg lying on the throne (*sukhasana*). In *Archaeologisch Onderzoek of Java en Madura*, Vol. II, Plates 40-42 are reproduced photographs of an image of Ganesa from Singasari in Java (now in the Ethnographical Museum of Leiden) which is seated with the right knee upraised and the left leg lying on the seat (surrounded by skulls). But in the Indian Museum there are two (Ja. 5 and 19) images of Ganesa from Java that are seated with the soles of the two feet joined. Photograph of Ja. 19 is enclosed herewith. This posture is un-Indian and appears to indicate a period of time when the Javanese image-makers had outlived the trammels of Indian tradition. In the photograph of the Borneo image the feet are not clear and probably mutilated. But there cannot be any doubt about the posture being the same as that of the two Javanese images of Ganesha in the Indian Museum, that is to say, seated with the soles of the two feet joined. The trunk (*sunda*) hangs down in a manner which suggests that, as in the Indian examples, it presumably rested on a bowl of sweets. The head-dress appears to be an elaborate conventional form of the *jatā*, the "matted locks" which Siva wears despite the incongruity in the case of Ganesha! If it is a *Jatā*, the image must represent Ganesha in an ascetic aspect, seated in meditation. This would explain the contemplative expression. But ascetic and contemplative Ganeshas are not known in India.

"The Javanese images are assignable to the thirteenth century A. D., the age of the Brahmanic temples of Brambanan and Singasari. The Borneo image, which in its posture seems to disclose Javanese influence, is probably to be assigned to about the same epoch but may be somewhat earlier. The earliest Brahmanic inscriptions found in Borneo (published by Vogel in a Dutch Journal of 1917 or 1918) are assigned to the fifth century A. D. This image of Ganesha shows that Brahmanic culture flourished in Borneo for a long period. For further particulars about the types of Ganesha images reference may be made to H. Krishna Sastri's *South-Indian Images*, pp. 165-176, and T. A. Gopinath Rao's *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 35-67."

The discovery of this image created great interest in Sarawak. Thousands flocked to the Sarawak Museum to see it. The Museum attendants had the time of their lives seeing that the god disposed of all the offerings made to it.

The accompanying illustration is from an enlarged photograph by Mrs. F. F. Boulton, who tells me that she gave another one to the Sikhs in Kuching, at their request, for their Temple.